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As Kanab reels from pandemic tourism, officials hope kindness campaign can curb vandalism and trash

The Be Kind to Kanab Campaign is aimed at making Kane County experience more enjoyable for visitors and locals.



(Lennie Mahler | The Salt Lake Tribune) Guides say that Buckskin Gulch, about 47 miles east of Kanab, has been particularly hard hit by the influx of tourists.

By Mark Eddington | July 16, 2022, 8:00 a.m. | Updated: July 17, 2022, 2:51 p.m.

 Comment

If being polite and refraining from littering, carving initials on trees and defacing Native American petroglyphs seems like a no-brainer. think again.



In Kane County, which has become a magnet for new-to-nature visitors, these misdeeds are things area leaders, professional outfitters and businesses have dealt with frequently during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It can make you sick to your stomach,” said Camille Johnson Taylor, who heads the Kane County Office of Tourism. “You think people would know better.”

Baz Luhrmann | Behind The Lens

Taylor’s office aims to kill these bad behaviors with kindness. And education.

Armed with \$50,000, a cash infusion from the county and a Forever Mighty Grant from the Utah Office of Tourism, Taylor and her tourism cohorts have launched Be Kind to Kanab, a campaign to encourage tourists and locals to protect the town and landscapes that make the area such a great place to visit and live.



The campaign is all about teaching respect: Respect for the people, the land and the experience — all of which have suffered somewhat during the pandemic as people from coronavirus-infested cities and suburbs have sought sanctuary in Kane County’s wide open spaces and nearby national monuments and parks.

There were over one million overnight visitors to Kanab in 2020, according to county tourism officials. The overnight numbers for 2021 are not available, but the transient room tax numbers are, and they show a massive influx of visitors.

TRT taxes for Kane County in 2021 were just under \$5.3 million, nearly double the \$2.8 million generated during 2020, according to state tourism officials.

But it’s not just about the numbers. It’s also about the nature of the people who are visiting, many of whom are novices when it comes to the outdoors. Unfortunately, a lot of these tenderfoots are tough on the county’s scenic attractions.

“Many of them do not have much experience in the outdoors,” said David Hercher, public affairs specialist for the Bureau of Land Management’s Paria River District. “They don’t understand the negative impact that seemingly small actions like writing their name on the rocks, littering or burning trash can have.”

Those impacts are increasingly seen throughout the area, especially among professional outfitters who lead backcountry tours. One especially hard-hit area is Buckskin Gulch, about 47 miles east of Kanab.

That's why Gagne and other outfitters often take part in site-stewardship and trail-cleanup programs that involve removing graffiti, feces, toilet paper and other litter soiling slot canyons and scenic landscapes.

To nature newbies, [Be Kind to Kanab Campaign's advice](#) is simple:

- Don't carve names or initials into rocks or trees.
- Fully extinguish campfires.
- Pick up trash and pack it out when there are no waste receptacles.
- And if there are no restrooms, dig a hole for human waste far from a water source or pack it out.

To help visitors better respect people, the campaign directs them to "engage with locals" to gain a greater appreciation for the area's culture and to be patient while waiting to be served at local restaurants, many of which are short-staffed due to the pandemic.

Be Kind to Kanab also teaches greater respect for the outdoors so tourists' backcountry experiences will be more awe-inspiring than agonizing. That includes planning ahead, making sure they have a physical map, plenty of gas for their car, water and food for their hike and appropriate clothing.

"We have some people who are totally unprepared," said Kane County Sheriff's Lt. Alan Alldredge. "Some get lost or hurt, or don't have enough food or water. The terrain or weather can change and people will find themselves standing on hot rocks in 120-degree heat and out of water."

To get the word out about the Be Kind to Kanab, county tourism officials are touting the campaign on billboards, posters, tabletop cards at restaurants and videos on its [website](#).

They are also using geofencing, an advertising technique directed at people entering a specific geographic area. When people enter Kane County, they receive ads on their social media and the mobile browsers on their smartphones that explain the Be Kind to Kanab initiative and direct them to the website to learn more.

Such efforts, Taylor explained, are geared toward making the Kane County experience better for everyone, not driving people away.

"We don't want to discourage people from coming here," she said. "Kane County relies on tourism. So we'll continue to be nimble and responsive and keep that golden goose laying its golden egg."



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